

Lauren Salazar

Professor Foster

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Removing Social Roles to Empower One's True Self

Virginia Woolf's "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" details the challenges faced by the main characters, Rosamond Merridew and Joan Martyn, in removing social roles. Social roles are linked to how someone should behave, obligations, and rights. Merridew's job as a historian involves searching for archives and genealogies related to families. During her search, Merridew is brought to the attention of Martyn when she discovers her journal dates back to the 1400s. In her findings, Merridew reads Martyn's journal and her difficulty with conforming to marry Sir Amyas to fill her social role as a wife. This follows the theme of facing difficulties while trying to eliminate their social roles. The theme is shown through the assets, demonstrated in personally created art, character comparison chart, scholarly journal, and a Ted Talk, on the first floor when critically analyzing it. This paper will only go in depth about the photography portion and the character compare and contrast chart.

The first asset shown is a photograph taken by Lauren Salazar, titled "The Independent Explorer", which embodies the main female characters in the story. The woman in the photo captures the female characters because of their expected compliance in their social roles. Specifically highlighting the character, Joan Martyn, Woolf's "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn", shares, "I thought, naturally, for a long time, until the dinner bell rung indeed at midday, of the general honour [honor] & burden, as my mother calls it, of marriage" (257). Martyn's mother's warnings made it difficult for Martyn to accept the topic of marriage, but she

ultimately accepted it. Martyn did not welcome the idea of marriage lightly. Marriage was expected of Martyn because (during the period in the book) it was linked to generating property and roles. This relates to the social roles of Martyn's time because she is expected to accept marriage to Sir Amyas to fulfill her social duties as a wife. Following the quote, Martyn lists the expectations as a wife by highlighting "great name", "great land", and "servants" (257). Each of those words is associated with status and how Martyn will fill the role of serving her husband's responsibilities because she is not her own woman anymore.

Ending off with the character comparison and contrast chart, it highlights Merridew's situation of the state not taking her seriously. Referring back to the short story, Woolf says, "I can look back, upon some very fine prizes that will have been of real interest to the historian... in their illumination please me even better" (241). Merridew's social role as a historian is to bring back evidence to her findings and other historians. She is expected to fulfill this, however, Merridew shares her passion within the story. There are moments when Merridew does reference her social role expectation, but her comments admiring the artifacts are highlighted in the text. Merridew challenges her social role by going against the grain. By the end of the story, the characters argue against eliminating social roles by taking empowering measures.

Work Cited

Squier, Susan M., et al. "Virginia Woolf's *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 25, no. 3/4, 1979, pp. 237–69. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/441323>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.